

# IMPORTING A POPULATION

BY EDWARD P. IRWIN,  
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(Continued from Saturday)

From that time on the number of Chinese in the Islands rapidly increased. They acquired a foothold and some of them were admitted to citizenship as early as 1842. By 1852 forty-five Chinese had become citizens of the Kingdom of Hawaii.

The first assistance of immigration to Hawaii occurred in 1865, when 199 male Chinese, 43 women and 8 children, recruited by William Hillebrand, Royal Commissioner of Immigration, arrived in the Islands. By the terms of the contract into which they had entered, they were to have free passage to the Islands, lodgings, food, clothing, medical service—and the enormous wage of four dollars a month. As a special favor their masters allowed them Sundays off and three Chinese holidays a year. They were contracted to serve five years, at the end of which time they were to be allowed to return home if they wished.

But, as a matter of fact, few of them were able to go home at the end of their five years' contract. Though nominally free men working for a wage, they were virtually slaves. If they wearied of their work in the fields and ran away from the plantations, they were pursued like criminals by the police and when caught, as they usually were, they were punished by being made to serve their masters for a longer term of years. They were not infrequently encouraged to get into debt at the plantation stores and were then compelled to work out the debt by longer service—at four dollars a month. So that in many cases there was no more chance for them to return to China than if they had actually been bought at a slave auction, as were the blacks of the South in ante-bellum days. It was peonage, pure and simple.

But this beautiful system came to an end in 1898 when Hawaii became a part of the United States. The days of easy and cheap labor were ended, and the planters had to look elsewhere than to China for their field hands.

At the time of annexation there were in the Islands about 29,000 Chinese—to be exact, 25,742 males and 3,465 females. Though there have been many children born of Chinese in Hawaii, the number has for a decade been gradually decreasing through the return of the Celestials to their own country.

Yet the Chinese still play an important part in the life of the Islands. Usually honest, industrious and thrifty, many of them are wealthy while none is poverty-stricken. They have largely displaced the native Hawaiians as tillers of the soil, and though many are still working for the plantations, a large proportion are independent market gardeners or merchants and mechanics. Those who were citizens of the Kingdom became, by virtue of the Organic Act,

citizens of the Territory, and they and the younger generation of Chinese born in the Islands very eagerly exercise the right of franchise.

## Starvation Wages.

For decades the planters have been paying a labor wage upon which a white man would starve, and it goes sadly against the grain with capital, to raise wages. The planters say they cannot afford to pay higher wages than they now pay—yet Ewa plantation in 1909 netted approximately \$1,000,000. The plantation could have paid every one of its field and mill hands double the wages that were paid and still would have cleared many hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Hawaiian Commercial and Sugar Company cleared during the year 1909 a million and a half dollars—yet could not afford to pay its laborers a fair wage. The plantations of the Island of Kauai netted over a million and three-quarters dollars—but when the question of increasing wages was brought up the planters held up their hands in horror and had terrible visions of imminent bankruptcy.

To the disinterested observer it is obvious that, if the plantations were absolutely prohibited from importing European or Asiatic labor, and were obliged to turn to white American labor, the planters as well as the community at large would be much better off. But the planters cannot yet see it that way. This may be partly, perhaps, because of the fear the planters have that with the coming of white immigration from the States would come also the ultimate breaking up of the great estates of thousands of acres. The ideal and ambition of the average American is to own his home and sit under his own vine and fig tree. Not forever would he be content to be another man's man. He wants to be his own master and to reap the harvest where he has sown.

Conditions in Hawaii in regard to land ownership are much as they were in California at one time. A few individuals hold in fee, or under long lease, nearly all of the valuable agricultural land, and they are by no means eager to loose their hold. At present it is very difficult for one not on the inside to get possession of land upon which he can build a home and make a living. It is true that the Territorial Government has at last adopted a policy of setting aside Government lands for homesteaders, but this is done under conditions that do not attract the white man. Moreover, most of the land which the Government is able to break up into homesteads is not of a quality nor in a location favorable to small farming. Under a new act of Congress, however, amending the Organic Act, this condition is to be materially changed for the better.

## Next, the Japanese-Labor Problem.

When the Chinese stepped out, his cousin from next door stood ready to step in. The Japanese became the field laborers, and with their advent in large numbers was created a situation which is even yet serious. They poured in in eager thousands, until today there are no less than 72,000 of the sons and daughters of Nippon in Hawaii, almost outnumbering all other races combined. Gradually they have driven the white man out of many lines of work. Until the Federal Government stepped in and began constructing fortifications and erecting military posts and naval stations, upon which citizen labor is used, it had been for several years almost impossible to find an American mechanic. They had been driven out of the country by the cheaper but infinitely less efficient Japanese. Today on the plantations the blacksmiths, carpenters, engineers and even the sugar-boilers owe allegiance to the Mikado. Some plantations have gone so far as to employ Japanese chemists. The white population of the Islands dwindled steadily from 1900 to within the past two or three years. Now, since the beginning of what is virtually the military occupation of the Islands, it is again increasing, though few American mechanics are employed, except on Government works.

The Japanese came in as cheap laborers and cheap laborers they have remained. All their efforts to get a fair wage have failed. Last year nearly all the Japanese employed on the plantations of the Island of Oahu went on strike for higher wages. The strike was

probably the most peaceable in the history of labor troubles. But the planters were horrified and dozens of the strikers were arrested and charged with all kinds of crime, from illegal imprisonment to conspiracy. Some of them are still serving long jail sentences. After all, they had but followed the example of the American working-man.

Now the Japanese, too, have been excluded, not by any exclusion act on the part of the United States, but by prohibition on the part of the Government of Japan at the request of the American Government. No more Japanese laborers are coming in, and some of those who were here at the time the prohibition of emigration from Japan to the United States went into effect have drifted away. But the total Japanese population in Hawaii is decreasing very little, if at all, births among the resident Japanese being probably enough to make up for emigration and deaths.

This has its political as well as its sociological aspect, for many of the Japanese children born on American soil and therefore eligible to become, by the simple act of election, American citizens, are reaching their majority. Some have already become voters, for a good many Japanese came to Hawaii before annexation. Within five years, it is predicted, there will be more of these Japanese-Americans than there will be Hawaiian voters. There is a possibility of the Legislature of Hawaii in the not far-distant future being largely composed of Japanese.

(To be continued)

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